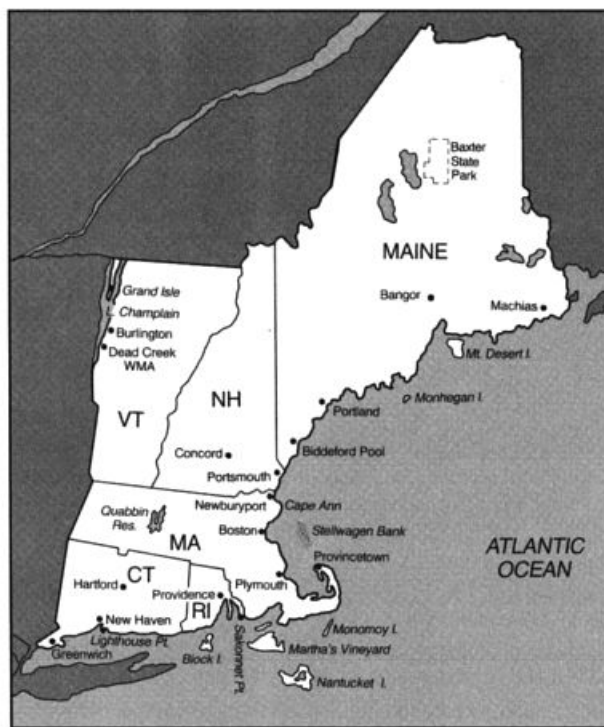


New England



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Spring 2002 was far from dull. Meteorologically speaking, 17 April and 18 May stood out vividly, though neither appeared to have a profound effect on birdlife. The temperature on 17 April shattered records when the mercury topped out at 93 degrees Fahrenheit in Boston, but by late in the day, the temperature there had plummeted 32 degrees in an hour. On 18 May, snow fell as far south as points just west of Boston, while at higher elevations in western Massachusetts, snow stacked up to nearly a foot! Otherwise, by most meteorological parameters, the three-month period averaged near normal.

An occluded front over the Region in mid-April knocked down an assortment of migrant waterbirds across a wide swath in the interior; numerous, very early arrivals included several shorebirds, Caspian Tern, Chimney Swift, flycatchers, and warblers; and headline highlights included White-faced Ibis, an obliging Eurasian Kestrel, Bar-tailed Godwit(s), flashy flycatchers, and buntings in technicolor. A first state nesting record for Black Vulture was not unexpected. First state records, each pending review by the respective state rarities commit-

tees, included Ross's Goose in Maine and Pacific Golden-Plover and Lazuli Bunting in Massachusetts.

Abbreviations: Martha's Vineyard (Martha's Vineyard I., *Dukes*, MA); Monhegan (Monhegan Is., *Lincoln*, ME); Nantucket (Nantucket I., *Nantucket*, MA); Plum I. (Plum Island, including Parker River N.W.R., and towns of Newburyport, Newbury, Rowley, and Ipswich, all in *Essex*, MA).

LOONS THROUGH IBISES

As is often the case in the Region, Pacific Loons were found only in Massachusetts. This year, singles were in Provincetown 2-4 Mar (G. Hirth) and Rockport 23 Mar (B. Stevens). Two Sooty Shearwaters were somewhat early at Stellwagen Bank 11 Apr (P. Flood et al.), a Manx Shearwater off Stamford, CT 8 May (P. Dugan) was unusual so far w. in Long Is. Sound, and the largest count of Northern Fulmars during the reporting period was 40+ at Rockport, MA 15 Mar (RSH). A fly-over ad. **American White Pelican** caused a stir among the nesting gulls on Appledore Is., York, ME 30 May (A. Borrer), and this or another put in an earlier appearance on the Connecticut R. in Northampton, MA 23-24 May (TG). Up to 2 **Anhingas** passed through our airspace (why don't they *ever* land in New England?). Rhode

Island's 3rd was soaring over Providence 12 May (D. Finizia et al.), and another (?) was over Hingham, MA 16 May (D. Peacock).

Western Grebe is not quite annual in the Region, so the discovery of at least 2 and possibly as many as 4 was rather remarkable. The first was seen almost daily at Plum I. 6 Mar—30 Apr (RSH); then it or another individual appeared in Rye, *Rockingham*, NH 18-19 May (R. Woodward). Lastly, 2 Westerns were found in Newmarket, *Rockingham*, NH 29 May (SM). Whether any of the 2 or 3 New Hampshire birds were the same as the Plum Island bird is unknown. The Eared Grebe that has wintered annually in Gloucester for at least the last seven years was last reported 14 Apr (B.O.), and another at Napatree Pt., Westerly, RI 27-28 Mar (CR), seen where one appeared last year, was also a probable returnee.

A classic spring fallout 15 Apr produced a goodly variety of coastal-wintering waterbirds across sections of the interior, and some of the drop-outs lingered for several days. Associated with an occluded front, their ranks included grebes, large waders, ducks, and larids. The grebes included a fairly high inland count of 10 Red-neckeds in Farmington, CT 18 Apr (PC), 5 Red-neckeds and 14 Horneds in Turner's Falls, MA on the Connecticut R. 15 Apr (MF), and 2 more Horneds upstream in Holyok, MA 17 Apr (BB). At the apparent epicenter of this particular grounding event, Turner's Falls on 15 Apr also produced 9 Lesser Scaup, 6 Red-breasted Mergansers, 7 Bonaparte's Gulls, and the Region's first Common Tern of the spring (MF). The large waders included at least 10 reports of Great Egrets in inland New Hampshire 18-20 Apr (*vide* PH), a Snowy Egret in Hanover, NH 18 Apr (A. Mudge), and a Glossy Ibis in Jefferson, NH 18 Apr (B. Grossman). A Little Blue Heron checked in early at Salisbury, MA 28 Mar (J. Soucy); a wayward Yellow-crowned Night-Heron found its way out to Monhegan 14 May (B. Boynton), and a wandering Glossy Ibis made it as far as the Maine/New Brunswick border in Amity, *Aroostook*, ME 21 Apr (J. MacDonald). When Snowy Egrets appear far inland, they usually do so during the post-breeding season, so a Snowy in Northampton, MA 23 May (BB) was noteworthy. New Hampshire's 2nd **White-faced Ibis** in Stratham, NH 17 Apr (D. Hughes) was at the same location where the Granite State's first White-faced appeared 15 Apr 1995, and this or another White-faced furnished a 3rd state record for Maine, when it appeared in Scarborough 18 May (M. Libby et al.). Maine's bird was found in the same location this year as last year's 2nd state White-faced, and these two records probably involved the same individual

VULTURES THROUGH WATERFOWL

Black Vulture was finally confirmed nesting in w Connecticut, where they had been present in substantial numbers for nearly 10 years and where they had been suspected of breeding for nearly that long. A nest was discovered by rock climbers in Kent 1 Apr (P. Redmond) and confirmed with photos 6 Apr (J. Zipp). No additional nesting evidence has been found in Massachusetts since the first New England breeding record for Black Vulture was established in 1998, but the species is probably nesting in the s. Berkshires in Massachusetts (north of Kent), where multiples are present each year virtually throughout the spring and summer. However, despite their increases in southern New England, they appear to be making little headway farther north; none were reported from Vermont, New Hampshire, or Maine.

Among the various overwintering Greater White-fronted Geese in the Region, 2 lingered into the spring season in Connecticut, and 4 were reported from Massachusetts. Maine's first **Ross's Goose** visited Clinton, *Kennebec*, ME 3-9 Apr (W. Sumner, LB et al., ph., vt.). The season's only Richardson's Canada Goose was found in Whately, MA 4 Apr (M. Williams).

SA A dark-bellied Brant identified by an experienced observer as belonging to the Old World form *Branta b. bernicla* (known as Dark-bellied Brant, or Dark-bellied Brent Goose) was seen among a flock of pale-bellied Atlantic Brant, *B. b. hrota*, in Newburyport, MA 25-26 Apr (RSH). This was the second consecutive spring in which a dark-bellied brant was found at this locale, and other, similar individuals have appeared in recent years elsewhere in the Northeast (e.g., Long I., NY). Historically, virtually all the darker brant found on the Atlantic Seaboard were assumed to belong to the form *B. b. nigricans* that winters on the Pacific Coast (known as Black Brant). But now the genetic makeup and geographical origins of these East Coast visitors are coming under closer scrutiny.

Yet another type that has recently been found in Britain—and that may already be part of the equation on the East Coast—is the poorly known form, which has no taxonomic designation (sometimes called "Gray-bellied Brant"), that nests in the western Canadian High Arctic and winters in the Padilla Bay area of the Puget Sound region. Possibly clouding the identification of such birds is the possibility of interbreeding of *hrota* and *nigricans*. Observers are encouraged to document and photograph unusual brant extensively, as this puzzle comes into sharper focus.

Most if not all of the Tundra Swans in the Region were holdovers from winter. They included 3 in Massachusetts, 2 in Vermont, and one in Connecticut.

Reports of Common Teal included 2 or 3 in Massachusetts and one in Connecticut, and wintering **Tufted Ducks** again lingered into spring in Massachusetts. A male Tufted in *Worcester* that overwintered for the 7th consecutive year was last reported in Shrewsbury 19 Mar (ML), and a female that probably spent the winter in or near Westport went undetected until it was found there 17 Mar (ML). In recent years, the numbers of Harlequin Ducks have been increasing in Massachusetts, while wintering flocks at certain other traditional sites in New England, such as Sachuest Pt., Middletown, RI have decreased somewhat. It would be nice to know whether one is begetting the other. The 116 Harlequins in Rockport, MA 6 Mar (W. Harrington) apparently represented a new state high count, while the 48 at Sachuest 19 Mar (R. Larsen) equaled only slightly more than half the wintering total that typically graced this spot 10 years ago. Surf Scoters migrating overland in the Region put down on lakes and ponds less frequently than do either of the other two scoter species. The occurrence of 10 at Cherry Pd, Jefferson, NH 18 Apr (D. Govatski) may have been related to the waterbird grounding event discussed above. An ad. male Common x Barrow's Goldeneye was identified in Newburyport, MA 26 Mar (RSH).

KITES THROUGH CRANES

The May arrival in Massachusetts of kites on Cape Cod has become predictable and routine, especially at the bottleneck at Pilgrim Heights in Truro. While the bulk of this year's Bay State Mississippi Kite flight came in early Jun, a single scout arrived in Truro 16 May (D. Manchester et al.). But the main raptor event this year was the appearance of a (age?) male **Eurasian Kestrel**, also on Cape Cod. First discovered but seen for only one day in Wellfleet 14 Apr (L. Bostrom), an omni-vigilant raptor veteran then relocated it 18 Apr on Morris I. in Chatham (RVC et al., ph., vt.), where it remained through 5 May, much to the delight of birders from all over the continent. This record was the 2nd in the Region, the first having been the first for North America, a specimen taken in Hull, MA 29 Sep 1887. Eurasian Kestrel has also been recorded in New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and New Jersey. The ad. Gyrfalcon that was first discovered in South Boston, MA in Dec 2001 remained in the area at least until 30 Apr (RD, N. Smith et al.). A big two-day pulse at the Plum I. hawkwatch 4-5

May included 374 Sharp-shinned Hawks and 33 Merlins (TC), the latter total coming on the 2nd day alone. At this same watch, American Kestrels were moving hard and fast early on, as indicated by the fact that that the cumulative total of kestrels had topped 500 birds by 4 Apr (TC). Three different Golden Eagles were reported from Massachusetts, and one was noted in Bangor, ME on the late date of 28 May (B. Barker, *fide* JD).

The only King Rail report came from Stockbridge, MA 17 May (ML). In keeping with the upward trend in recent years, Sandhill Cranes numbered 10 in four states: 3 in Addison, VT 14 Mar (A. Pistoious); one in Munroe, NH (4th consecutive year at this site) 21 Apr (E. Emery); one in Providence, RI 14 May (R. Farrell et al.); and 5 in Massachusetts. The latter group included singles at Nantucket 8-27 Apr (R. Lay et al.); Muskeget I., *Nantucket* 20 Apr (I. Nisbet); Reading 27 Apr (M. Daley), Bolton 4 May (B.O.); and Provincetown 16-27 May (B. Goode). As of this writing, no information was available regarding the re-nesting of the pair of Sandhills that established the Region's first modern-day breeding record in cen. Maine last year.

PLOVERS THROUGH ALCIDS

Very few American Golden-Plovers veer eastward to New England during their northbound migration each spring. Two this year included one in Chatham, MA 4-10 May (J. Weeks et al.), and another (?) at Nantucket 12 May (RK). Massachusetts's long-awaited first **Pacific Golden-Plover** was discovered at Plum I. 21 Apr—5 May (J. Smith, RSH et al.) Carefully studied by many birders, both local and otherwise, it was determined to be an ad male in alternate plumage. The only previous Regional record for this species was from Maine in 1911.

Only within the last five+ years has American Oystercatcher become regular in spring n. of Massachusetts, as the species has expanded its breeding range slowly northward and eastward to the Canadian Maritimes. This year, among the 6 reported from Maine, none was farther northeast than the pair that returned to a relatively new nesting site in Saco, *York*. A single "cracker" was also note on the Isles of Shoals, *Rockingham*, NH 2 May (D. Hayward et al.). An American Avocet seen at the s. end of Boston Harbor in Quincy, MA 11 May (KR) moved the next day to East Boston at the n. end of the harbor (P. & F. Vale), where it remained until 15 May (D. Eatough).

Two sightings of **Bar-tailed Godwit**, one at Old Saybrook, CT 18 Apr (D. Varza, ph.) and the other at Martha's Vineyard 4 May (VL),

probably involved the same individual. Both apparently pertained to a bird in breeding plumage of the Asian race *baueri*, much the rarer of the two races that occur in e. North America. Four of the 5 Lesser Yellowlegs that overwintered in Newburyport, MA were still present 1 Mar (C. Buelow), and an early Willet at Plum I. 9-10 Mar (T. Wetmore) also may have spent the winter somewhere in New England. A Semipalmated Plover in S. Dartmouth, MA 7 Apr (E. Nielsen) and a Least Sandpiper in Essex, MA 3 Apr (RSH) were notably early as well. The only Ruff of the season made a four-day stay in Newburyport, MA 24-28 Apr (RSH). For the first time in many years, no Ruff was reported in the Region in the month of May.

Pomarine Jaeger records are very few in Connecticut, so a fly-over "Pom" on Long I. Sound, in Madison 11 May (D. Sosensky et al.) was very noteworthy. The high count of Lesser Black-backed Gulls came from the Regional stronghold at Nantucket, where 27 were still lingering 11 Mar among the other wintering gulls (E. Ray), and a wintering "Nelson's Gull" remained in Plymouth at least through 23 Mar (S. Moore).

Among the 6 Caspian Terns noted in Massachusetts, 2 in Boxford 6 Apr were remarkably early. Other Caspians detected as they slipped through the Region (presumably en route to the Canadian Maritime colonies) included 2 in W. Swanton, VT 24 May (D. Lavallee) and one in Middletown, RI 1 May (J. Maggill). Two Forster's Terns returned on or about 24 Apr to Newburyport Harbor and Plum I. (RSH), where the species has probably been breeding since they were confirmed nesting there in the early 1990s.

A high count of 10 Common Murres at Cox's Ledge, off Rhode Island 2 Mar (S. Tsagarakis et al.) was consistent with a recent winter trend toward higher-than-average number of Commons in our coastal waters. Dovekies are very unusual anywhere in Long I. Sound, but a Dovekie off West Haven, CT 30 Mar was especially far west (R. Belding).

CUCKOOS THROUGH SWALLOWS

An early Yellow-billed Cuckoo was banded in Plymouth 26 Apr (M.C.C.S.). Following an above-average winter in the Boston Harbor area for Snowy Owls, 3 lingered at Logan Airport until 26 May (N. Smith). A Snowy at Stratton I., Saco, ME 20-31 May (LB) was reported to have been banded in Massachusetts (*fide* S. Hall). To track the movements of Snowy Owls fitted in Massachusetts with satellite transmitters, go to: http://www.massaudubon.org/Birds_&_Beyond/Snowy_Owl/index.html.

A Chuck-will's-widow heard in South Wellfleet, MA 5 May (G. Page et al.) remained through the spring season and was presumed to be the same bird that has been calling at that site for the past several years. A Chimney Swift in Newmarket, NH 9 Apr (P. Hendrickx) was the earliest on record for the Granite State.

An extremely early Eastern Wood-Pewee was reported from Gray, Cumberland, ME 2 Apr by an observer who saw the bird and heard it sing, and who realized the seasonal significance of the record (L. Woodward, *fide* K. Gammon). An Eastern Kingbird was also roughly a month early in Raynham, MA 29 Mar (E. Giles). The flashiest tyrannids of the season included a **Fork-tailed Flycatcher** at Nantucket 24 May (vt. RK) and a **Scissor-tailed Flycatcher** at Pond I., Phippsburg, ME 27 or 28 May (*fide* S. Hall). Scissor-tailed is more or less annual in the Region; Fork-tailed is not.

Two Loggerhead Shrikes were reported: one from Ferrisburgh, VT 16 Mar (J. Osborn) and the other from Narragansett, RI 31 Mar (D. Wait). Loggerheads have become a *bona fide* rarity in New England within the last 10+ years, as is true on most of the Eastern Seaboard now.

Common Ravens continue to reoccupy portions of their historical range that they began to vacate not long after the arrival of European colonists more than 200 years ago. Two new breeding outposts were established in e. Massachusetts. A pair fledged 4 young from a nest they built on a telecommunications tower near the Rhode Island border in Blackstone (J. Collins et al.), and though the other nest was not located, breeding in the Blue Hills, Milton/Quincy, MA (within sight of Boston!) was confirmed on the basis of observations of an ad. carrying food (KR). As yet (but stay tuned for next season's report), ravens very rarely appear on the coast, so a raven on South Beach, Chatham, MA 1 May (P. Flood) was a nice find. Fish Crows remained ensconced at their current northernmost breeding outposts in Portland, ME and Burlington, VT, and the sudden appearance of a flock of 51 in Marshfield, MA 15 Mar (DF) did little to illuminate the mysterious local status of this species, which surely goes unnoticed among its more common congener.

Boreal Chickadees that remained in Massachusetts into the spring following a minor winter incursion southward included singles in Granby 1-4 Mar (F. Pike) and Windsor 18 Mar (C. Blagdon). Three Northern Rough-winged Swallows in Turners Falls, MA 30 Mar (TG) and one in Canton, MA 31 Mar (J. Young) furnished rare Mar records for a species that, more typically, first appears about two weeks later.

WRENS THROUGH TANAGERS

Carolina Wren continues to push the envelope northward; in far n. Maine, a single Carolina first discovered in winter was still present this spring in Caribou. Somehow the use of the words "Carolina" and "Caribou" in the same sentence smacks of global warming. The only report of a Sedge Wren came from Marshfield, MA 31 May (DF). Rare, yet nearly annual within the Region, a Townsend's Solitaire in N. Smithfield, RI 23-29 Mar (D. & D. Bernard et al.) provided only the 2nd state record.

Typical numbers of Bohemian Waxwings remained in n. sections well into the spring season. The high count in New Hampshire was 140 in Laconia 6 Apr (C. Anderson), and the Vermont maximum was a robust 512 in Burlington 12 Apr (*fide* W. Scott).

Several species of warblers either returned to Massachusetts very early or they successfully overwintered locally. These included a Northern Parula that visited a sunflower feeder in Truro 1-7 Mar (C. Skowran, *fide* J. Sones), a Prairie Warbler in Rockport, MA 10 Mar (B. Drummond et al.), a Northern Waterthrush (apparently already on territory!) in Pittsfield 3 Apr (T. Collins), and a Wilson's Warbler in Cambridge, MA 10 Apr (J. Trimble). A Prairie Warbler was seen in late Nov 2001 at precisely the same spot in Rockport where the Mar bird was found; draw your own conclusions. One of the biggest warbler fallouts of the season occurred at Block I., RI 12-13 May. Single-day totals on one or the other of these two days included 45 Northern Parulas, 75 Magnolias, 3500 Yellow-rumped, 35 Black-throated Greens, 27 Blackburnians, and 90 Black-and-whites (D. J. Abbott et al.). Another heavy flight at Monhegan 19-23 May included an estimated total of several hundred Northern Parulas (TV). A male Prothonotary Warbler in Hingham, MA 11-31 May (and into Jun) was defending a territory and seen to be carrying nesting materials into a natural tree cavity as far as anyone was able to determine, despite his best efforts, he was never successful in attracting a female. The only overshooting s. warblers that made it into one of the three northern-tier states included single Hooded Warblers at Monhegan 23 May (S. Hamel, *fide* TV) and Sugar Hill, Grafton, NH 10 May (R. Brown). A Louisiana Waterthrush was seen and heard singing 25-26 May in Somerset, ME, at a site 144 km. n. of Portland and 64 km n. of the nearest known nesting areas (R. Joseph, *fide* JD).

The few overshooting Summer Tanagers that reach the Region each spring are found much more frequently on the coast than they are in interior sections of the Region, so an ad

male in Hadley, MA 29 May (G. LeBaron) must have come as a pleasant surprise. A well-described female Western Tanager was reported from Kennebunk, York, ME 21 May (D. Doubleday et al.), and a 2nd report of a Western Tanager, lacking details, came from Portsmouth, NH 20 May (J. Beaudain, D. Casey).

SPARROWS THROUGH FINCHES

Clay-colored Sparrows numbered 2 in Vermont, 3 in Maine, and 4 in Massachusetts. The Vermont and Maine birds appeared in May, but all the Bay State birds were reported much earlier, between 8 Mar and 6 Apr. Most of these individuals probably overwintered in the Region. It has been several years since no Clay-colored Sparrows were found in Massachusetts in May. Two **Harris's Sparrows**, both in Massachusetts, were in S. Dartmouth 24 Mar—7 Apr (S. Bolton et al., ph.) and Salisbury 18 May (J. Hoye et al.). A good (for spring) flight of White-crowned Sparrows included an above-average 26 at Plum I. 7 May (RSH). Single Lark Sparrows were in Middlebury, VT 8 Apr (J. Peterson) and at Monhegan 19-23 May (G. Dennis et al.).

Buntings made a big splash this spring. Three **Painted Buntings** in the Region included 2 in Maine: a female type that was banded at Appledore I., York 28 May (D. Holmes et al.) and a male (presumably adult) at Biddeford Pool, York 30 May (B. Chappell et al.). The 3rd Painted was in Lexington, MA 28 Mar (R. Gantside). But the headliner was the male **Lazuli Bunting** at Nantucket 5-10 May (M. Aguiar et al., ph.). The only previous record for this species in the Region was from Maine.

Western Meadowlark was a more regular visitor to New England up until roughly 20 years ago, but more recently, its appearances here have become sporadic and few, perhaps reflecting the downward trend in all North American meadowlark populations. A singing Western was noted in Turner, *Androscoggin*, ME 18 May (JD). The only Yellow-headed Blackbird report came from Chatham, MA 17-18 May (P. Bailey), and the season-high count of 7 Boat-tailed Grackles, 21-30 Apr, came from their only known New England breeding site in Stratford, *Fairfield*, Connecticut (PC). Crossbills that were late to retreat from points south (barely) of the three northern-tier states included 4 Reds in Salisbury, MA 22 May (I. Lynch) and 2 White-wingeds in Monroe, MA 18 May (ML).

EXOTICS

Three Whooper Swans in Ipswich, *Essex*, MA 1 Mar (JB) were known to be escapees or proge-

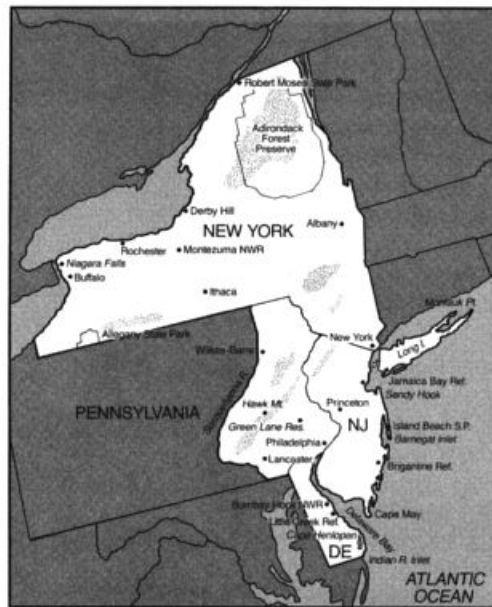
ny thereof. A European Goldfinch visited a feeding station in Hulls Cove, Mt. Desert I., ME on an unspecified date in May (*fide* WT), almost certainly a former captive. Finally, a Nutmeg Mannikin spiced up (pun intended) a yard in York, ME 24 May (J. Raynor, L. Bevier, ph.).

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Following a very warm, dry winter, March saw a return to more nearly normal weather conditions. While April's average temperature was also about normal, 8-19 April was a very warm period, with heat-wave conditions in the southern areas

15-17 April. The temperature in New York City reached a record 96° Fahrenheit. A cold front on the 19th ended the heat and brought northerly and westerly winds for most of the rest of the season. May was cool and wet, and with the prevailing wind direction, hawkwatch totals were depressed. May nonetheless produced one of the best spring migrations along the coast in many years. In particular, a spectacular wave on 10 May extended from coastal Virginia through Long Island.

Highlights of the season included reports of Black-bellied Whistling Duck, Ferruginous Hawk, Black-throated Gray Warbler, and Townsend's Warbler in New York; Pacific Loon, Sabine's Gull, Vermilion Flycatcher, and Swainson's Warbler in New Jersey; and, remaining from last season, a Dusky Flycatcher in Delaware. Also notable were Western Grebe and inland Arctic Tern in New York; and Eurasian Whimbrel in New Jersey.